



*... because
your move
matters!*



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Distinctive Homes ~

Distinctive Lifestyles

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Sheila Dowell's “Home News”

*News To Help You Save
Time, Money and Have Some Fun!*

From the Desk of Sheila Dowell ...

Our local markets-The Woodlands, North Spring and Montgomery County had a very active resale home market in June and July this year. Inventory was low and it was the “typical peak season for buyers”. Mortgage rates for 30 yr fixed loans averaged less than 3.50%, 15 yr loans less than 3%! Forecasters were predicting- and we continue to see- buyer demand, especially in areas away from expensive cities and/or highly populated cities like Houston.

The pandemic also added some new buyer “must haves”, in response to the increased “working from home” and “doing more activities at home”: spaces like dedicated home offices, workout rooms, even soundproof studios for video conferences.

When selling a home, more changes to a resale home’s sale plan become evident. “Mostly” gone, are the traditional Open Houses, replaced by Virtual ones. In-Home information set-ups now include hand sanitizer, wipes, disposable gloves, single-use masks, booties and a laminated chart illustrating how to use them. Social Media call-outs have become part of the plan. All of these are important, but NONE as important as the need for STAGING a resale home that is on the market!

The National Association of Realtors has done studies on the value of having a home staged professionally before putting it up for sale:

- 49% of buyer’s agents said that staging had a positive effect on most buyers’ outlook on the home. I personally see that buyers want to view homes that are staged when given choices.
- 77% of buyer’s agents said that home staging helped buyers visualize themselves in the home

Virtual staging does not have the same effect when a buyer walks into the home and can’t remember how it looked online with the virtual staging. That is why I use a professional stager that brings in furniture in addition to the smaller items.

- 39% of sellers’ agents stated that home staging greatly decreases the length of time a home is on the market AND increases the contract price from a buyer.
- 90% of my listings over the last 3 years have sold in less than 10 days.. 1 took as long as 19! ALL were staged professionally. most closed at full price or over.

View 3 on HAR that I listed and had sold in The Woodlands:

- 68189301, 51 Stardust Pl;
- 75782917, 54 Bellweather Ct;
- 5217821 15 E Racing Cloud

One more thing: let me clarify: a professional stager’s purpose is very different from an interior designer’s usual work.

The typical designer wants to make a home livable for the residents. A stager’s goal, on the other hand, is to emphasize home’s assets, minimize its less desirable facets, and make everything look big, light, bright, and open in the photographs that all buyers today see online before they decide to spend time on a personal visit. Staging-savvy designers can work wonders with dark rooms, spaces that are too small or too large, furniture that’s out-of-scale for the setting, too much furniture, strange floor plans, poor color choices, and dowdy design features. Whether what they do is comfortable to live in is almost immaterial. So, usually it’s uncomfortable! But if the goal is a shorter time on the market and more money in the bank at closing, isn’t a short term inconvenience worth it?!

I believe in this value to the seller SO much, that I pay for it!

If you are considering a sale in 2020 or 2021, please call me. My focus has ALWAYS been on minimizing your stress and maximizing your return!

~ Sheila



“Master Chef-in-Training”

Michael is Sheila's husband of 30+ years. His hobbies include ballroom dancing (Still Dancing!), gourmet cooking - especially baking, and -just added- GOLF! We played golf 15 years ago (Michael, the natural athlete and Sheila... not so), so the return to this sport has been a bit slow. Fortunately, we aren't thinking of competing with this sport!

Month #5 of cooking every day and keeping Sheila happy with the choices! Evening “sharing time” begins in our patio room at 6 pm with a glass of red wine for her and a Scotch and water for me. 30-45 minutes later, the prep and cooking starts: some of Sheila's favorites are becoming once a week “regulars”. Her #1 choice is my Chinese Chicken Dinner... cut up chicken, lots of fresh vegetables, a spicy sauce and some rice. Leftovers become her breakfast the next day (she really is a “veggie freak”!) I know this is extensive and may be “too much work” for many home cooks, but know that much of it is optional... can be modified to your personal taste. I will share the specific brand of ingredients I use, but you may have your own favorites.

Michael's Chinese Chicken Dinner

Cook the rice of your choice. Sheila has tried to get me to use brown rice but I remain firm on using Basmati rice!
Make up the 2 sauces that will be used:

1st one is a marinade for the chicken:

- 2 T of Lower Sodium Soy Sauce (I use Kikkoman Less Sodium -37% reduced but San-J has a 50% less sodium choice)
- 1 T Sesame Seed Oil (I am using Polar 100% pure @ this time)
- 1 T Szechuan Sauce (see <https://san-j.com/products/szechuan-sauce> for information and to purchase or @ HEB. If you go to the San-J site, you will find SO many interesting sauces, and recipes to try).

We use 6 oz of cut-up bite sized chicken and place into bowl. Pour marinade over the chicken and let set for 15-20 min. (Sheila cuts up several chicken breasts when she buys them and cuts them into bite-sized pieces, then vacuum seals 6oz packages for future recipe uses.)

2nd one is a sauce will be used during the cooking process:

- 1 Heaping T of white flour or cornstarch (I call it a “mound”)
- 1 T + 1 tsp of Chinese Five Spice (I use Morton & Bassett)
- 1 T of Szechuan sauce
- 2 T Soy Sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil

Put ALL of the above 5 ingredients into a 2 c measuring container, fill to the 2 cup level with hot water and mix well. This sauce will be used when cooking.

Chop vegetables: we use broccoli, mushrooms, green bell pepper strips, celery, carrots, “Chinese” pea pods - enough uncooked vegetables for 4-5 cups.

Peel, then finely dice 4-5 garlic cloves OR 1 T of Minced Garlic in the jar (I use Spice World minced garlic-HEB)

Peel, then dice a 2” piece of ginger OR 1 T of Minced Ginger in the jar (I use the Ginger People's organic minced ginger. Visit their site @ gingerpeople.com for some other products you might enjoy! HEB)
Using a large Wok or Frying pan - must have cover - heat and add enough peanut oil to cover the bottom.

Add chicken and marinade and mix them around in the wok. When they begin to brown, add the garlic and ginger, mix well and cook for 1-2 minutes until chicken is brown.

Add vegetables, mix thoroughly, then add Sauce. Mix again and cook for 2-4 minutes, depending on how crisp you like your vegetables. Sheila is a “raw vegetable aficionado”, so we are closer to the 2 minutes!

Serve with the rice... makes enough for 2-4 servings!

Questions or to share YOUR success, email me at mrddowell@gmail.com . ❖

Thanks to All my Clients for their Referrals!

There are SO many people to say “Thank You” to this time!

Thanks to Bob and Cindy for listing their rental home in The Woodlands Village of Creekside with me. See the details at

*<https://www.har.com/homedetail/55-sagamore-ridge-pl-spring-tx-77389/3799208>
Professionally staged, this home went under contract in 4 days.*

Thanks to Anne and Jef for asking me to help them lease a home in The Woodlands. Preferring to have a large single story that would accommodate their family when visiting, they were excited to find one in Grogans Forest that spanned over 3300 sq.ft. Thanks again to both of you!

Thank you to Steve and his wife, Alice. Deciding to retire in Palm Springs, they asked me to refer them to an agent there would could guide them to a single story with a pool. Thank you, David Alexander. You understood exactly what they wanted and spent the time making sure they were happy.

And thank you to Jeanette and her daughter, Sarah, for referring their friend, Melissa, from Clear Lake to me. She retired last year and decided she wanted some space in the country...but near shopping and entertainment venues! Walden provided a perfect match for her!

After 25 years of being in Full Time Real Estate Sales, I still get excited when I am asked to help someone with the biggest investment they will probably ever make!

Outdoor Living Trends to Try in 2020

1. Fire Pits: With so many of us spending more time at home, fire pits are becoming more popular than ever. As summer wanes and the cooler weather approaches (in our world, that means temps under 92 degrees!), people are naturally drifting more frequently toward outdoor spaces. Slowing down, enjoying conversation and life's moments are a few of the life lessons we've all had to learn over the past few months. In this way, fire pits are more than décor – they represent spending time with the ones we love.

2. Bright Colors (Coral, Lemon): According to Google Trends, lemon yellow searches are up by 103% over the past 6 months; coral, by 50%. So, it's IN! with bright colors, out with boring neutrals! Spending more time in our homes and backyards means embracing more of our own personal style and personality and learning to seize the moment when what WE LIKE is the trend! What better way to do that than with splashes of fun, playful, energizing color.”

3. Small Space Outdoor Furniture: Years ago, the average homeowner would have overlooked a small space patio or backyard. Now, people are doing double-takes. Think round. Round tables, round stools . . . curves soften and open up a space, as opposed to harsh lines and enclosing angles.

4. Creative Outdoor Seating: As we adapt to a new way of life that encourages social distancing, outdoor spaces will be the preferred setting for many gatherings. As such, the rise in outdoor seating trends couldn't have come at a better time. Online Google searches are up for some of the more popular choices going 6 months back: Adirondack Chairs 303%; Hammocks 216%; and Egg Chairs 189%!

5. Green is contagious (Sage, Emerald, Mint): It's the color of nature! As we consciously move toward healthier living, green speaks volumes about the energy we choose to surround ourselves with. Incorporate it easily in your outdoor space with a painted planter or an outdoor rug. ❖

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- A free market evaluation of my property.
- I'm interested in buying a home.
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- Now In three months In six months
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\$100.00 Trader Joe's Gift Card (9/25/20)

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JUST FOR FUN!

Each day, about 10,000 baby boomers reach age 65 and they're increasingly shifting into retirement mode, according to the Pew Research Center. Many have expressed a desire to move to beachfront properties. But they may want to avoid pricey coastal retirement havens in favor of more affordable beach towns.

"Retirees are undoubtedly drawn to these areas by the active, beach lifestyle," says Danielle Hale, realtor.com®'s chief economist. "The relative affordability of homes in these towns means more of a fixed income is left over for fun."

Realtor.com® researchers recently identified the most affordable beach towns for retirees by evaluating 1,300 oceanfront areas in the U.S. Their rankings are based on towns with higher populations of residents aged 55 and over; housing affordability based on median list price; access to hospitals and health care facilities; and the number of amenities and places for a social life, such as golf courses and country clubs.

Here are the 5 beach towns that topped realtor.com®'s list!

1. Murrells Inlet, S.C.
Median list price: \$329,950
2. Venice, Fla.
Median list price: \$299,950
3. Morehead City, N.C.
Median list price: \$339,050
4. Lewes, Del.
Median list price: \$399,050
5. Toms River, N.J.
Median list price: \$299,950



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